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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses four strategies used by the author in college English courses to discourage fraud yet to allow students enough freedom to conduct original research. The strategies include generating "topic lists," in hope of beating term paper "clearinghouses," which must certainly have a time-lag on the topics in their collections; an "oversight" strategy, which requires students to present evidence of research progress at two or three junctures between project assignment and final presentation; a "rigid form" method, which prescribes a formula for writing the argumentative essay, thus freeing the student to think about collecting evidence and presenting the final paper, and providing the teacher with an opportunity to catch papers that don't follow the rules; and a "level of research quality" strategy, which requires students to generate their own primary evidence by interviewing, constructing and implementing surveys, or some other form of personal involvement. While all the strategies have advantages and drawbacks--teachers may want to combine strategies for maximum positive effects--their use encourages students to attempt scholarly research and to produce competent, original research papers. (RL)

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# OUTFOXING FRAUD: RESEARCH PAPERS WITHOUT REPRESSION

The fraudulent term paper is something we all know exists; it's something turned in to another professor in another department. Most of us have never seen one. Or have we? At the 1977 meeting of CCCC, I distributed copies of three research papers to a seminar audience. Two were legitimate papers turned in to me during the last year; the other paper I had ordered over the phone on a Friday and received the following Monday along with my Bankamericard receipt for $14.45. Only 13% of the audience successfully identified the purchased paper. The fact that the least popular paper was the fraud came as a definite surprise to some. It was not a particularly good paper; it might have received a D+ in one of my research courses but then again, it might have received a higher grade from an overworked grader. My point was to demonstrate that many college teachers think they would certainly recognize a fraudulent paper if one came across their desks. But what were they looking for? Was it the excellent research paper which was obviously far above what is expected of a freshman? Most agreed that one of the other papers was a superior piece of research. I knew the paper was legitimate simply by looking at the bibliography and when I compared it with the purchased paper, I saw that not only were colleges and professors being hoodwinked by these "research clearinghouses" but the students were, too. $14.45 for typos and an unheard-of footnote format!

Of course, the "research clearinghouses" which occasionally slip their ads into the school papers are operating just this side of the law. The clearinghouses apparently do not intend for students to merely turn in the

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purchased paper as a finished product. Their order blanks require the purchaser to sign a statement to this effect. I did not sign such a statement because my order was placed by telephone. Moreover, were I desperate enough to "buy" my research assignments, I would hardly have a qualm about making a false statement. The statement is designed to protect the clearinghouse from legal action by the school. Frankly, I doubt there is much we as teachers can do about the operations themselves; legal action against the clearinghouses is costly and not always successful.

But the question of whether we can do much about the reality of having fraudulent papers turning up among the collected assignments for our courses is another matter. Moreover, there is the additional question of whether we, members of the intellectual body, should even bother about this fraud. In the end, it is the student who suffers. Research projects are not generally assigned as busy work; if students choose to circumvent this learning process then it is they who are the poorer for it. Or, so goes the argument of the college or university as the citadel of pure intellectual endeavor. Of course, such a view is hopelessly idealistic. The institution of higher learning in America has become the "certifier" of those entering into American economic life. Some of us have actually traded on this function to compete for dwindling numbers of students. Right or wrong, valid or invalid--we are stuck with the duty of stamping our seal of approval on the newcomers to the competitive white collar job market. If we are beguiled into so sealing a student by his fraud, then when the student's lack of knowledge and skill becomes apparent, not only does the student suffer but leaders of business and industry will turn to us, the trusted certifying institution, with genuine questions. Schools such as my own, a private and predominantly black liberal arts college, feel this threat with particular keenness. If the discrepancy

between our seal of approval and actual performance of the certified student occurs too often, we will feel its effects in our student recruiting and in ou· endowments. Quality control is simply a matter of life and death to more than a few American colleges and universities.

Under such conditions, it is not only advisable for teachers to deal with the fraudulent research paper, it is imperative. The effort to bring the force of law to bear on the clearinghouses which sell these papers may be useful. But it is doubtful that these operations can be completely curtailed; at best, they can be forced underground. In addition, confronting a student after the fact without concrete evidence, which is difficult and expensive to obtain, is legally hazardous to the teacher; the best solution is prevention. Such prevention is best when handled by the teacher who assigns the research as a course requirement.

The second semester of Freshman English, as I teach it, is essentially a course in the conduct of scholarly research and the effective presentation of it in writing. Order blanks for term paper catalogues staring back at me from the school paper now and then have encouraged me to try some strategies which might make it difficult for the student to avail himself of these shady services. Teachers can invite dishonesty by their uninformed methods of teaching. It would be pleasant to assume the honor and integrity of each student; but the reality of quality control requires more from us. On the other hand, teachers do not have to institute a police state in the classroom to discourage dishonesty. A little calm consideration can suggest approaches which will discourage fraud but will allow enough freedom for the student to conduct inspired and original research. I have experimented with at least four different strategies to accomplish this very nearly contradictory goal. Some systems work better than others; a lot depends on the teacher directing

the research and on the students doing it. Others work better in combination than alone. I will briefly describe each strategy and suggest some of the advantages and disadvantages of each one.

My first angle was to generate Topic Lists. The teacher who says "Write about anything within such and such limits" is asking for the fraudulent paper. A literature category page from the 1976 catalogue of one of these clearinghouses distributed among the CCCC seminar audience gave several members pause. Included were standard themes on O'Connor, Greene, Brontë, Conrad, Waugh, Austen, Dickens, Browning, and Joyce. My topic lists include such things as the S.A.L.T. agreements, Rape Laws, Capital Punishment, the Living Will, Zero Population Growth, Solar Energy, Right-to-Work, Black Capitalism, Teachers' Unions, Illegal Aliens, and Sociobiology. The lists are fairly rigid but there is always plenty to choose from. My second innovation was to include only very current topics. I can do this because the content area for Freshman English is unlimited. I have tried to select topics which would have appeal to students in all majors and to all levels of interest. The idea behind offering current topics is the hope of beating the clearinghouse catalogue which must certainly have a time-lag on the topics in its collection. It doesn't always work. I nearly fainted when I received a copy of a research catalogue, opened it randomly to a paper title on one of the most popular topics on my listing--The Negative Income Tax. While the limited topic list is not a panacea, it's a start. At least it narrows the field down for the "enterprising" student who will order his research "off the rack." But these clearinghouses also offer "made to order" research papers at significantly higher prices. Moreover, the catalogues are highly competitive and they stay current.

The second strategy is something I call Oversight. Most teachers I know use this method to discourage fraud. Oversight requires a student to present

evidence of his research progress at two or three junctures between the assignment of the project and the presentation of the final paper. Note cards may be required; working outlines may be discussed in conference; first drafts may be submitted for approval. There is no doubt that such strategy detracts substantially from the advantages of paying some one else to do a student's work for him since he has to put in a lot of time fabricating the preliminary evidence. But the teacher has to put in a lot of time, too. Checking over or even just checking in twenty sets of index cards is time consuming and dull. Seventy-five--my student load--is unreal! While requiring evidence of each step in the research process definitely tends to reenforce good scholarly habits, it also tends to be a bit repressive. I have never rendered my note-taking to index cards; if I had to present my note cards, I would have to sit down and neatly copy--they will be graded, won't they?--my torn and rumpled legal pages, my envelope backs, my napkins and paper towels, my paperback title pages and even my check deposit slips. And believe me, I would resent someone else telling me that his research system is superior to mine!

The oversight system may work well for some but not for me. I like to assign two research projects, one for graded practice, and one for a representative demonstration of everything the student has learned about research, and these have to be accomplished along with other objectives for the course. I do check up on the students' progress at one critical point, however. This check is related to my third strategy, the use of a Rigid Form.

Over the years I have streamlined my teaching of the essay. Trial and error convinced me to narrow to the essay forms which will most likely get students through their college careers with the greatest success. Narration and description still show up in my course but subordinated to the development of the argumentative paper; exposition becomes a direct outgrowth of our

examination of the argument. Using newspapers and a little classical rhetoric, I developed an expandable formula for writing the argumentative essay which I call the Editorial. Here is an abbreviated outline of how the basic formula works and how variations on the basic form are worked in. Also as a working part of the formula is a mini-formula for incorporating research into the essay (Step 3 (a)(b)(c)).

EDITORIAL FORMULAE USED FOR RESEARCH

Possible Paragraphing

<u>One-Sided Editorial</u> (Argumentative)

(1) Statement of General Topic. Background Details: Arousal of Interest in Audience. Statement or Implication of Editorial Question.

(2) Statement of Position

(3) Presentation, explanation and illustration of 1st Supporting Reason. For supporting evidence:

- (a) Introduce (Source, credentials, date),
- (b) Present and footnote if necessary,
- (c) Show connection between evidence and Reason it supports.

Repeat 3 Steps of Evidence presentation for additional pieces of evidence.
Continue to Presentation, explanation and illustration of 2nd and 3rd Reasons.

(3A) --Optional--Anticipate one Objection from the opposing Position, then

- (a) Explain it away (with evidence presented as in Step 3), OR
- (b) Allow the Objection to Stand but be outweighed by supporting reasons as repeated in the Summary.

(4) Restate Reasons briefly without elaboration.

(5) Restate Position as conclusion, include a Call to Action, if appropriate.

<u>Two-Sided or Multi-Sided Editorial</u> (Expository)

(1) The Same as in the One-Sided Editorial

(2) Present the available options for audience consideration objectively. Any number of options may be presented.

(3) Present, explain, illustrate and support with evidence at least 3 Reasons for Option #1.

(3A) Present, explain, illustrate and support with evidence at least 3 Reasons for Option #2.

(3B) Repeat with a set of Reasons for each additional Option.

(4) ReGroup and briefly restate each set of reasons with its supported Option.

(5) Conclude by requesting a decision or other appropriate action from the audience.

Students who write research papers for me are expected to be reasonably faithful to this formula or one of its variations. Such rigidity of form bothers some of my colleagues--the argument is that it may stifle creativity. However, students do not seem to view the formula as oppressive. My freshman students react to it very positively because it solves one of the worst problems of the inexperienced writer, the order of presentation. The use of the rigid form also allows a large degree of advanced planning. Within a week or so after the topics for research have been assigned, I ask each student to show me a working outline for the research paper. The strategy of the rigid form helps to reenforce the habit of planning ahead and it impresses the student with real savings in time and effort.

While the use of the rigid form of the research paper frees the student to think about the collecting of evidence and about the eloquent presentation of the final paper, it provides me with a very easy opportunity to pull out the paper which does not follow the rules. Many teachers may find a rigid form like this one too constraining; I admit that it takes a full semester of training to get most freshmen to use the Editorial form and its variations competently enough for research. Moreover, while I doubt that the papers carried by the clearinghouses will coincidentally be written in Editorial form, it is quite possible and I would think relatively easy to rewrite a purchased research paper into Editorial form. What I am banking on, you see, is that the student too lazy to do the research will also be too lazy to rewrite anything for which he has paid $15 or $20.

I hit on the fourth and best strategy, the Level of Research Quality, rather by accident. One of my better students came around to complain that the libraries had nothing of help on an up-to-date topic she had chosen from my topic list. I said, in a rather off-hand way, that she could "make" her evidence.

Not invent it, but go out and find it in the community somewhere. This, after all, is the technique of non-fiction writing in the real world. The student conducted an interview of a local expert on the topic; the resulting paper was very exciting. Over the years since then, I have made a concerted effort to push the college student beyond the resources of the school library. I now teach the telephone book as a more indispensable research source than the almanac; the idea of calling another library to track down sources is pretty heady stuff for a college freshman. But the student who wants an honor grade--an A or a B--on his research paper will have to do even better than that. His paper will have to exhibit at least one piece of primary evidence, exclusive evidence, evidence only he has and cannot be found in exactly the same form anywhere else. The principle way students accomplish this requirement of primary evidence is by interviewing scholars, experts--including doctors, lawyers, clergy, social workers, government officials--or anyone else who might give an authoritative opinion. The interviews are conducted by telephone, in person, and through the mail. And the results are dramatic. Two students have reported back to me offers of full-time employment; interviewees know a sharp, motivated kid when they see one in front of them. Other students have fulfilled the requirement for primary evidence by constructing and implementing surveys. Whatever the angle, these papers are fresh, exhilarating, and original. One student particularly successful at conducting interviews told me that he would never again be satisfied with library research alone. "It's just too dull."

But like any of the three approaches I have discussed already, this one has some drawbacks. Evidence gained from the interview or the survey is the icing but it is worthless unless the cake is underneath it. Encouraging

the use of primary research cannot substitute for instruction in the fundamental research techniques for the library. It is another "add-on"; it is another two, three, or four class periods of special instruction to be worked into an already crowded semester schedule. The students need time to pursue their often elusive sources and they often need special coaching for dealing with the personal interview. Frankly, I think it is worth the time. The excitement it generates in the student--the sense of the power in research, as my office-mate puts it--is incomparable. Nevertheless, I do not demand it absolutely, only for the honor grade. My rationale, of course, is that such research is impossible in the fraudulent paper, at least, one from the clearinghouse. Thus, I am protected from awarding honor grades, at any rate, to the perpetrator of a scam.

I won't say that I have never been fooled into accepting a fraudulent research paper. But I think being aware of the possibility and facing it realistically has helped me to not only reduce the chances of it happening--protecting in my small way some of the integrity of the academic community--but it has helped me to do a better job of encouraging students to attempt scholarly research and to produce competent and exciting research papers.